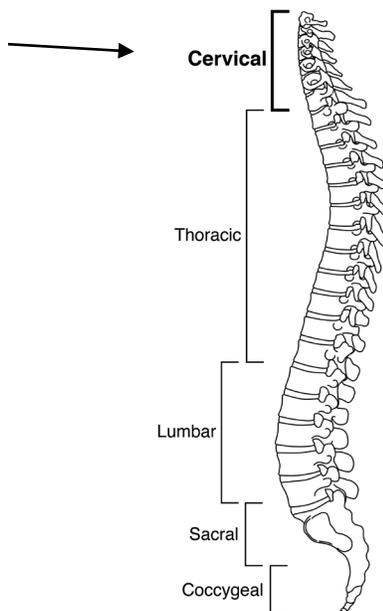


Cervical Spine Injury

What is the cervical spine?

The C-spine supports the weight of the head. It runs from the base of your skull to the upper back. It consists of seven vertebrae (C1-C7) which protect the spinal cord and nerves. There are disks between each vertebra. The bones of the spine are connected by many ligaments that provide support to the head and neck.



What is a cervical spine injury?

A cervical spine injury can happen when a great amount of force is placed against the spinal column. An injury can happen if the spinal column is not strong enough to stand up to that force. Injury can occur to the vertebrae, disks, or the cord. This can cause pain, numbness, weakness, and tingling. Symptoms vary in each person.

What are the types of cervical spine injuries?

- Bone fractures
- Ligament injuries

What tests will I need?

- X-rays look at the bones in your spine.
- A CT uses x-rays to get detailed pictures of bones and other tissues.
- An MRI gives us a detailed picture of ligaments, spinal cord, and nerves.
- A physical exam will also check your cervical spine to see if you have pain when pressure is applied or with movement.

How is it treated?

If you have an injury, you will be seen by a spine doctor. First, the spine must be stabilized with a neck collar. The Philadelphia (Philly) collar, a rigid collar, is put in place right after any trauma. This collar may be changed to a PMT collar.

Your doctors will decide if you need surgery. If you remain in a collar, you must wear it at all times. Your doctors will decide how long you will need to wear it. You will also need to wear the collar if you have a ligament injury. Sometimes, if the x-rays do not show damage but you still have neck pain, you will go home in the collar. You will need x-rays taken again in the clinic in 2 weeks.

What can I expect in the hospital?

You will need to lie flat in bed to keep your spine aligned until a brace has been placed. This can be uncomfortable, but you need to do this to protect your spine. To turn in bed, you must be rolled by the nursing staff. This is called “log rolling”. It allows you to be turned while keeping your spine aligned.

You may not be able to eat anything until your doctor decides if you have a spine injury. This can take up to 24 hours. This is in case you need to have surgery. If you need surgery, you will not be allowed to eat. We will give you fluids through your IV to keep you hydrated.

You will not be able to use a pillow. Your spine does not stay aligned when you use a pillow. If you use a pillow, it can cause further damage.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 10/2019 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#6906